

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
OFFICE OF THE CHILD ADVOCATE  
18-20 TRINITY STREET, HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06103**



**Sarah Healy Eagan, J.D.**  
**Child Advocate**

**VIA E-MAIL: [RiveraM@newlondon.org](mailto:RiveraM@newlondon.org)**

October 17, 2019

Chairman Manuel Rivera  
New London Board of Education  
134 Williams Street  
New London, CT 06320

**RE: The Office of the Child Advocate Status Update Letter Issued October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

Dear Chairman Rivera:

The purpose of this letter is to respond to the concerns you expressed to me, and which were copied to the Board of Education and the Superintendent of Schools and counsel regarding the Office of the Child Advocate's ("OCA") Investigation Status Update letter offered on October 14, 2019.

In June of 2019 the OCA was asked by the New London Mayor to conduct an investigation into the systemic concerns surrounding allegations of abuse of students in New London public schools, which investigation remains ongoing. On June 13<sup>th</sup>, OCA reached out to you and the Superintendent with notification of our involvement. I did not receive a response from you. OCA was however provided information that the District had retained Shipman and Goodwin as counsel of record and that such counsel was helping to coordinate responsive activities in the District. Accordingly, the OCA initiated a meeting with counsel in June of 2019 to describe our involvement, the parameters of the investigation and to learn about activities the District was taking in response to the reported allegations of abuse.

Since that initial meeting with your legal counsel, the OCA has submitted information requests to the District and corresponded on multiple occasions with the District's lawyer. On September 30, 2019 the OCA notified counsel that we had been asked by Mayor Passero to provide an update on our investigation and, if we could, preliminary recommendations to help or further guide child abuse prevention activities for the District and the City. At the same time, the State Department of Education (SDE) had also reached out to our office to learn more about our work and our intended focus areas, and we let the SDE know that we would copy them on this anticipated update.

Following those communications, the OCA received additional information from Superintendent Ritchie regarding new initiatives that she had implemented in response to student safety concerns.

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Contrary to your assertion, the OCA's Status Update Letter specifically credits the Superintendent with such actions as we also did in our public remarks.

The Status Update Letter was drafted, consistent with our prior notification, to be a brief letter summarizing our process to date, and outlining general themes and recommendations for discussion and inclusion in the District's abuse prevention action plan. The letter was not characterized by OCA as a "final" or "interim" report, and cautioned that it was not a findings letter. I regret that you felt these preliminary recommendations offered "NO substantive information to guide you" (emphasis in original) as they were the product of child protection records review, discussion with abuse prevention and child welfare experts, and consistent with Title IX guidelines.

With respect to the New London elections referenced in your communication, please be assured that while the OCA responds to concerns from state or local officials regarding the safety of children, the OCA is an independent governmental agency whose work is not influenced by any particular party and/or candidate for state or local office. The OCA is concerned only with the overall safety and well-being of vulnerable children and our activities are designed to help strengthen systems of care.

As I indicated in my letter, the OCA's investigation activities will continue and include obtaining additional records as well as scheduling meetings with district and City officials. Once all of those activities are completed, a draft report will be provided to stakeholders for feedback. After such feedback is received, a final report will issue. We look forward to a final result that best serves the children of the City of New London.

Sincerely,

Sarah H. Eagan, JD  
Child Advocate  
State of Connecticut

Cc: Cynthia Ritchie, Superintendent of New London Public Schools  
Honorable Michael Passero  
Kevin Roy, Shipman & Goodwin